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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

FOR G/TIP, EAP/MLS and EAP/RSP

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SUBJECT: POLICE ACTION AGAINST PROSTITUTION -- CAUSE FOR  
CELEBRATION?

¶1. (U) Summary: Recently, the police of Toul Kork district started a campaign against prostitution, rounding up 47 prostitutes from nine brothels and other venues in the area and referring them to NGO shelters. Twenty-seven customers and two facilitators were arrested during the operations, but all were later released. Police claimed these raids are part of the government's agenda to eliminate prostitution. The NGO community believes that the police should be focusing on arresting pimps and brothel owners rather than merely removing sex workers from brothels. End Summary.

The Raids  
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¶2. (U) On August 24, local police authorities of Toul Kork districts raided nine brothels in Stung Meanchey area. (Note: this area is a well-known red light district in Phnom Penh. End Note.) The raid resulted in the removal of 35 voluntary sex workers and arrests of 27 customers who were visiting the brothels at the time of raid. The women were referred to AFESIP for psychological counseling and social services. The customers reportedly were counseled and released by the police.

¶3. (U) A few days later, police authorities conducted a similar raid on street-based prostitutes along Street 336 in Tuol Kork who were deemed an eyesore to the public. During this raid, police picked up 12 sex workers and two intermediaries. Police referred the sex workers to the Department of Social Affairs for further referrals as AFESIP's shelter had reached full capacity. The intermediaries were released after being counseled.

¶4. (SBU) Mr. Hout Yaran, a police officer in charge of the operations, claimed the raids are part of the "drizzling campaign"-- a regular and steady operation to eliminate prostitution. They were done following an order from the Phnom Penh Municipal Governor, he explained, noting that all districts in capital will have to implement this campaign. However, no one was prosecuted as a result of this operation. When asked, Yaran said that police have identified some suspects believed to be the organizers of prostitution rings and the police are trying to obtain arrest warrants from a court prosecutor.

¶5. (U) Ung Sokunthea, Director of the Cambodian National Police's Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department, corroborated that the raids were part of the implementation of the MOI's action plan from July 2005. From that action plan, all the provinces and municipalities are responsible for eliminating prostitution in their territory of jurisdiction. She could not explain as to why the Toul Kork police had not started implementing the order sooner.

¶6. (U) AFESIP confirmed the receipt of 35 women removed from the first raid, and maintained that it is AFESIP's policy to provide assistance to these women, regardless of whether they are victims of

trafficking or voluntary sex workers. They have yet to determine the age and situation of these women. Newspaper reports suggest that all the women are voluntary sex workers and no trafficking victims have been identified.

#### NGO Reaction

17. (U) Christian Guth, advisor to the MOI, disapproved of the action in that it targets vulnerable sex workers. Women turn to prostitution because of a lack of choice, he noted, and NGO shelters will not serve as their exit from prostitution. Guth thinks that the raids may be another way to show the government's commitment against immoral acts, citing the National Assembly's recent passage of a law against adultery.

18. (U) From the legal point of view, Sok Sam Oeun, Executive Director of NGO Cambodian Defenders Project, said there is no legal background for police action. Pimping is illegal but prostitution is not. Police should aim at eliminating pimping, rather than collecting prostitutes. He noted from his experiences in training police that some police officers do not understand the difference between prostitution, pimping and trafficking.

19. (SBU) Comment: Targeting sex workers alone is not a viable solution to ridding Cambodia of prostitution nor is it particularly effective in addressing trafficking in persons. The fact that no pimps or brothel owners have been held responsible after the raids on nine brothels raises questions as to the government's motivations. Police could have done a better job identifying and arresting the pimps and closing down the brothels, instead of only rounding up the prostitutes and turning them over to AFESIP. We agree with Christian Guth's assessment that the women will likely end up again on the streets. The Embassy will continue to follow up with police to see if indeed there are any further arrests as a

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result of recent actions. End Comment.

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